

1909 – 1935
The Bartlett-Florence Railroad
later named
The Bartlett-Western Railroad
Also called “Bull Frog” and “Big Windy”

When the Bartlett Tribune was published on September 3, 1909, the paper carried the following headlines: “Bartlett-Florence Railroad Now a Reality – Contract Let Yesterday – Construction Train and Grading Outfit Now Enroute – Work to Begin at Once”. Yesterday, the Bartlett-Florence Railway Company held their first general meeting at their office in Bartlett and elected the following officers: G. W. Hubbard, President, W. J. McDaniel, Vice-President and General Manager, H. W. Pech, Second Vice-President and General Attorney, C. C. Bailey, Treasurer, and John C. Collins, Secretary and Auditor.

Within a week the work commenced on the railroad. Just before the dirt was broken, Hon. J. V. Morris made an appropriate address. Next the plow held by Miss Grant of Lincoln, a stenographer for the railway company, was started by Col. W. J. Cagle and Dr. T. B. Benson, of this city, and Mr. John McDowell of Florence. The headquarters for the railway was established in the Hempel residence purchased from W. E. Cox.

In 1911, the railroad was sold by the original owners to a group of Bartlett men, including J. W. Jackson, J. L. Bailey, J. D. Jackson, W. W. Walton, C. C. Bailey, and H. A. Breihan. After they took over the railroad, the line was completed to Florence, Texas.

When the Bartlett Tribune was published on Jan. 5, 1912, the headlines were as follows: “Bartlett-Western Into Florence – Announcement of the Completion of the B-W into Florence”. The first train service on this road was fully celebrated on Wednesday, December 27, 1911, by the citizens of Florence, terminus of the road, 22 miles west of Bartlett. A train carrying some 250 to 300 people left Bartlett on the morning of the eventful day, the excursion rate being \$1 for the round trip. President J. W. Jackson, Vice President J. L. Bailey, and other officials of the new road were present and the vast crowd was looked after by those accommodating gentlemen and employees of the road, Messrs. T. J. Fitzgerald and J. S. Rogers. Speakers of the day were Hon. J. A. Brewster of Florence, Hon. J. V. Morris of Bartlett, and Hon. J. B. Salyer of Jonah.

In May of 1916, the Bartlett owners of the railroad sold out to Col. Thomas Cronin of Palestine, Texas, a pioneer in railroad building. The Cronin family, including Col. Cronin, his daughters, Miss Marie Cronin and Mrs. Ida Branagan, and her husband, William Branagan, and Thomas Wolf, a nephew of the Colonel, moved to Bartlett.

Col. Thomas Cronin was born in Ballyheige, Ireland, on May 3, 1843, the son of Philip and Julia Stiles Cronin. He came to the United States when he was six years old. He died in Bartlett, Texas on August 16, 1926. His wife, Margaret Donahue Cronin, daughter of Daniel Donahue and Ellen Sullivan Donahue, was born in Ballyheige, Ireland, on June 1, 1845, and died in Houston, Texas, on December 11, 1894. Col. and Mrs. Cronin were entombed in the Cronin Family Mausoleum in the Holy Cross Cemetery, Houston, Texas.

*Mrs. Ida Cronin Branagan, the daughter of Col. Thomas and Margaret Donahue Cronin, was the Treasurer of the Bartlett Western Railway System. She was born and reared in Palestine, Texas. She was prominent in Catholic women's work there, president of the Music Club, and organized the Palestine Public Library. She studied music in Paris, France. She died in Bartlett, Texas, on May 16, 1926.

*William Branagan was a resident of Bartlett for thirty five years. He was born in Iowa in 1867. He came to Texas and settled in Palestine, where he entered the grocery business. Here, he was married to Miss Ida Cronin on June 11, 1889. They moved to Bartlett when the Bartlett Western Railway was purchased by Col. Thomas Cronin, the father of Mrs. Branagan. He served as General Manager of the railway for Col. Cronin and later for Miss Marie Cronin until the line was discontinued in 1936. Mr. Branagan died on June 29, 1951 at the age of 84.

*Miss Marie Cronin, see Section on Bartlett Artists and First Ladies of Bartlett. Miss Cronin died July 24, 1951.

*Thomas (Mister Tom) Wolfe was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1885, the son of Morris and Mary Donahue Wolfe. In his early life he taught school and later entered the civil service. He was a railway mail clerk for twenty five years until an accident forced his retirement. He came to Bartlett to make his home with his uncle, Col. Thomas Cronin, and his cousins, Mrs. William Branagan and Miss Marie Cronin. Mister Tom died in Bartlett on June 8, 1948 at the age of 63.

They are all entombed in the Cronin Family Mausoleum, which is located in the Holy Cross Cemetery, Houston, Texas.

Holy Cross Cemetery, 3502 North Main Street, Houston, Texas: At the entrance to the cemetery take the first road to the right up to the first mausoleum which belongs to the Cronin family.